

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

It is by no means easy under war conditions to hold an international meeting of any kind. In spite of the difficulties the Administrative Committee of the World Council of Churches, which is in process of formation, was able to hold a meeting in Holland this month. Though the meeting was not a large one, it included well-known leaders of the Churches from ten different countries. The British representatives were the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Chichester, the Rev. Henry Carter and Dr. William Paton. There was a strong delegation from Scandinavia, including a representative of Finland, and one of the American members of the Committee came from New York for the meeting. Advantage was taken of the opportunity to review some of the major questions that confront the Churches at the present time.

THE QUESTION OF PEACE

No international group of Christians could meet at the present time without giving earnest thought to the question of peace. The approach to the subject of those from neutral countries and those from belligerent countries was naturally different. The major concern of the former was that the war should end before their countries were exposed to its horrors, while they were at the same time alive to the dangers of false peace. For the latter the die was already cast and their interest lay in the means of securing a just settlement. In spite of these differences there was remarkable agreement regarding the essentials of a real peace. There was also complete agreement that the mind of Christians in all countries must be actively directed to these questions. Steps were taken to provide for international co-operation in the study of them.

PRISONERS OF WAR AND INTERNED CIVILIANS

The needs of prisoners of war and interned civilians received special attention. Both in France and Germany measures are being taken similar to the services rendered by voluntary bodies in Great Britain (CNL No. 2). The number of prisoners of war in all three countries is still relatively small. Civilian internees are most numerous in France. In Berlin a joint committee of churchmen, representatives of the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations and other bodies, has been formed to undertake the spiritual care of prisoners. The problem will increase as the war continues, and plans are being made in Geneva by a committee of representatives of the Churches in neutral countries to provide for the religious and social needs of prisoners and internees.

REFUGEES

The difficulties and sufferings of refugees have been made more acute by the war. Emigration is difficult, though it is still possible from Germany if the passage can be paid for in foreign money. There is reason to believe that the execution of the plans for Lublin (CNL Supplement No. 6) has been postponed till March, and it is held in some quarters that the public indignation aroused by the policy of the German Government has had some effect even under war conditions in preventing the scheme from being carried out in its original form. Some members of the Committee which met in Holland had an opportunity of consulting with representatives of the international refugee organisation of the Roman Catholic Church. In the effort to meet this vast human need Roman Catholic and Protestant, Christian and Jew are working in close co-operation.

THE FINNISH STRUGGLE

It was evident from the reports from Christian sources in Finland that for the Finnish people the present struggle is a battle for the Christian faith. They conceive themselves as fighting not only for the preservation of a Christian civilisation in the northern countries, but also for the return of Christianity to Russia. They believe that their resistance may be the means of shaking the present tyranny over the Russian people and of re-establishing Christian liberty.

In addition to the strain of war the Finns have to deal with the evacuation of half a million of their people. Bishop Lehtonen is in charge of the evacuation work, and help from outside is needed to meet an urgent need. Contributions may be sent to Dr. William Paton at 2, Eaton Gate, London, S.W.1.

There is the further problem of caring for the thousands of prisoners taken in the war. The number of prisoners of war in Finland is larger than in any of the other belligerent countries.

THE SAPPING OF LIBERTIES

I have a letter from a member of Parliament commenting on the letter from an Anglican priest in East London, from which I quoted a fortnight ago. He points out that those to whom the letter refers are represented by one man in Parliament, two other men on the London County Council, and at least three others on the Borough Council; and he continues:—

“I happen to represent nearly 70,000 people of London in Parliament. No letter from any of them goes unconsidered or unanswered; no sincere request for a personal talk is ever refused. Most other M.P.s can say the same. No Minister will ever refuse our request for an interview, if we have something to pass on to him, and we possess unrestricted right to voice the troubles of the least of our constituents in the House of Commons. But this provision for the defence of liberties breaks down at once if the victim of bureaucracy fails to report it to the M.P. or the Councillor who is there to stand up for him. It breaks down also if the people collectively in their time of need find that they have taken too little trouble when times were easier about choosing the right people to represent them, with the result that they have only second-raters now to turn to till after the war.”

It is very relevant to the present situation to be reminded that we have in this country these safeguards of liberty, which have been won by the struggles of former generations. In totalitarian countries such restraints on arbitrary power are entirely

king. The gains are real and great; but they can be maintained only by a further advance. We have not set ourselves to create a population capable of exercising the rights of free citizens. Those whose education ceases for the most part at the age of fourteen and whose standard of living saps the strength of body and mind are ill-equipped for the fulfilment of their responsibilities. Right political institutions are necessary for the enjoyment of liberty; but they do not in themselves guarantee it. For its realisation much more is required. What that more is will be the subject of an early issue of the News-Letter.

THE NEWS-LETTER

Many of you are very good in writing to us, telling us what you think of the News-Letter and how it could be improved. I have had two long and careful analyses of the issues of the News-Letter up to date with valuable comments on their contents, one from a man I do not know, and the other from one whom I have met once. Help of this kind is invaluable and is none the less appreciated because one knows that the number of the memoranda which there is time to read and digest is limited.

Many of the things you want we have already begun to plan for. By your spirited efforts to enlarge our membership you are adding to our resources, and thereby enabling us to improve our service.

It adds to the zest of editing the News-Letter that our members are drawn from the most diverse circles. They differ widely from one another in tradition, habits of thought, language, and experience of life. Every day we get letters expressing divergent and contradictory opinions. What some of you praise, others deprecate; what suits one taste offends another. This would keep us, even if our performance were perfect, from meeting all the needs of all our members all the time. But this variety in our membership is one of our greatest assets. It creates the opportunity of widening our experience, of learning from one another, and growing towards a common Christian mind.

We have been wondering what would happen in regard to the renewal of subscriptions made for the three months which terminate with this issue. Of the sixty-seven subscriptions received the day following the renewal notice fifty-three were for a full year instead of for the shorter periods. We are most grateful.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Deane

Subscriptions.—The rate of subscriptions to the *News-Letter* is 10s. (\$3 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 5s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. for three months.

For Groups.—Special terms for group subscriptions have now been arranged. Details of rates can be had upon application to the C.N.-L. office.

Back Numbers.—We have had so many requests for copies of the Christmas Number, with Dorothy L. Sayers' Supplement, that we are reprinting it. We still have a few copies of earlier back numbers and these can be supplied to members at: Single copies, 3d.; six copies, 1s.; twelve copies, 1s. 9d.; twenty-five copies, 3s. 6d.

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Youth in Factories. A situation that needs careful watching is the increasing pressure on those under military age to meet the demands of industrial production. The suspension of the raising of the school leaving age has resulted in the flow of cheap juvenile labour into industry, and as successive waves of men are called up for military service greater demands are made on youth. The Factories Act of 1937 limits the hours of work for young people, but the Home Secretary has power to suspend or relax the provisions of the Act in factories engaged in Government work. Lads and girls are tempted to work overtime in order to increase their earnings or to fill the gap between wages and the increased cost of living. The average working hours of young people in industry does not, at present exceed, as a rule, 48 hours per week with six hours of overtime, but the number of exceptional cases is increasing.

In the distributive and other trades which do not come within the scope of the Factories Act the existing regulations of the hours of work are not always enforced as they ought to be.

No greater damage could be done to this country than to wear out its human resources, and the vitally important programme for the welfare and education of youth, which the Government is seeking to promote, cannot be carried into effect when the hours of leisure are curtailed, or when those for whose benefit it is intended are too tired to profit by it.

Religious Teaching in the Home. Among the many disturbances caused by the war has been the disorganisation of voluntary religious teaching. This lays new responsibilities on the home and creates new opportunities for restoring religion to its rightful place in the family circle and for the teaching of children in small numbers. In Germany also in recent times the elimination of Christian teaching from the schools and youth organisations has resulted in a revival of religious teaching in the home.

The National Society (The Central Council of the Church of England for Religious Education, 69, Great Peter Street, London, S.W.1) has for two or three years been giving attention to the teaching of groups of children at home and various experiments have been made. With the coming of the war the plan has found a new use. To aid such teaching in the home a new series of attractive picture

leaflets for children between the ages of 5 and 10 has been prepared. Each leaflet contains instruction and work for two weeks and the series provides material for the year.

From a French Soldier in the Front Lines. "More than ever at this time we Christians must live out our faith and our whole conduct must be an encouragement and reinforcement for those who surround us. The sad thing about military life is to see what a mixture there is of baseness and grandeur, of grossness and the highest virtues.

"More than ever we must depend on God. At the very moment when everything collapses under our feet, God does support us by His grace, provided that we ask Him for it. I can myself bear witness to that, for in the midst of the most exhausting work and the greatest dangers, I have experienced a more profound peace than I have ever known before. Here in the front lines, we have learnt to esteem our enemies, however contemptuous we may be of their official ideologies. We know that they are doing their duty as best they can whatever the danger. We recognise them as fellow men—and as brave men.

"Our own duty is less clear. We know that its grandeur derives from its purpose: to win a war which we may call a 'war of independence.' But we know also for each one of us its grandeur depends on the manner in which we carry out the hundred and one duties of our calling, under conditions which mean that at every moment life is in danger. This duty demands everything of us, and, in order that they may accomplish it, God gives to those who have faith in Him a security which banishes all anxiety."

Task for C.N.-L. Collaborator. Professor John Baillie, of Edinburgh, who is one of our Collaborators, will be leaving for France in a few days to take charge of the educational activities of the Y.M.C.A. During the last year he took a leading part in the Y.M.C.A. in France and Flanders, and was largely responsible for the initiation and promotion of its educational programme. This led on to the development by the Army authorities and the Association of what Mr. H. A. L. Fisher subsequently described as "the largest scheme of adult education which has ever at any one time been launched from this country."

OUR MEMBERS CONTRIBUTE

I.—Expressions of the Lay Mind

The following are extracts from letters from three of our members. The writers are all men of standing and weight in their professions and in the general life of the community. It is safe to assume that what they say expresses what is in the minds of many others. Taken together, the letters show how vast is the task which confronts the Church in this bewildering and bewildered world.

I.

I would like you to think of the writer of this letter as a man who, owing to the year in which he was born, is poised between two periods—the years before 1914 and the years immediately preceding the present war. Too young to take an active part in the Great War, but old enough to feel the effects of those four long years, growing up under their shadow, and developing in thought and experience in the decade that followed, he has reached the middle thirties a half-breed. The early, peaceful years of his life are still vivid in his memory; the years of education, coloured by the presence of war, are still underlined in red in his mind; and, finally, the restless, ever-anxious atmosphere of the last decade with its changing colour and its atmosphere of uncertainty have brought him up against the recurring tragedy of war, which he grew to hate so bitterly in earlier years.

The feeling among young people in the years following the last war was one of relief, of determination to forget. But very soon the hectic life which this attitude brought in its train, and the clear portents of changes and trouble to come, made the young people realise that the rather old-fashioned cocoon which they were striving to weave around themselves

was neither safe nor satisfactory. They were forced to think—and to look forward—although with the years came a reluctance to face the grim ordeal which they felt would soon come their way.

One is often tempted to look back over the years and to fix the blame for what has come to pass on statesmen who ruled the countries of Europe during the past twenty years, or, again, to point to the lethargy of the younger generation. Yet it is not fair to say that young men and women did not realise at the time that things were not as they should be—that there was a general attitude of complacency prevailing in this country which failed to grapple with fundamental issues at stake. A feeling of futility, a lack of purpose, and, above all, the absence of a definite creed in national life, made these years the failure they have proved to be in retrospect.

And now once again war is with us. But the romantic enthusiasm which has so often marched hand in hand with war is absent. Many men and women in this country, and perhaps in others engaged in the conflict, realise only too clearly that the end of Hitlerism does not necessarily mean the dawn of a new day. They know that war in itself achieves nothing, and that unless creative thought and spiritual activity can work their way through the horrors that war stands for, then the world will be far worse off when all is over than in the lost years between 1918 and 1939.

A great many of us realise the urgent need of spiritual guidance unfettered by convention and national colour. We are convinced that with all its great qualities and its traditions, this country is not per-

fect; that other countries have, in the past, had the right to call us self-righteous and insincere. We want the country to face the fact that our own house badly needs repair, and that a blind love of the past can bring little good to England or to mankind as a whole.

In these days such talk is considered unpatriotic, but that is nonsense. Surely to be patriotic is to attempt to ensure that your country is honest in its own beliefs; that it can live up to its tenets, and that it can be of as much use to the rest of the world as possible. So, when we are told that we are fighting a war to right a grievous wrong and to rid the world of hatred and horror, we of this age realise only too well that to conquer Germany will achieve nothing at all unless we as a nation can face the faults which are hidden away in our own make-up—if we cannot substitute for an idealism which is part genuine, part patched up, a clear, definite line of thought which will be entirely worthy of the world's respect.

There is no doubt that many feel the need of this, that they are not content merely to "get on with the job" and see what happens when it is "over." Germany and Russia have had, during the past twenty years, an idealism of a kind. It has been a burning, all-powerful factor in each man's life. *We*, meanwhile, have talked vaguely of democracy, still more vaguely of Christianity, and we have been content to repose as comfortably as the times allowed on the sofa of national tradition. We admire much of that tradition, we realise how greatly some of it has contributed to the happiness, culture and humanity of the world, but we know, too, that we are not in any way perfect. Enthusiasm for a definite conviction of creed, a genuine humility hand in hand with definite purpose, must be the foundation of our life, and we have not possessed such a creed during these years.

There is no doubt in my mind—and a lurking conviction in the minds of many who do not profess Christianity—that this creed alone can fulfil the needs of this country and of the world at this present stage.

The organisation of the Church has

failed, you will say, and so Christianity its organised form is not to be thought as the guiding force in this country. The Churches, and especially their leaders, have certainly failed to a great extent, especially during the past two anxious years. A far more definite and explicit call, a more active and intimate challenge is needed, and the Church should not hesitate to make such a call at this grim stage of our history. Men and women are ready for it, but they expect it to be free from the shackles of political colouring. And yet the laity are entirely wrong in putting the Church's account the whole burden of failure. Fully half the cost should be charged to them. They have made little or no attempt to meet the clergy half-way; they have not bothered to read or learn; they have shunned organised religion, they have broken up into cliques full of small prejudices.

The time is ripe for an approach between the two elements—for an active, true Christian campaign which can put into the hearts of all those who are seeking for a real purpose in life, for a future based on truth and hope, a definite basis on which to plan the future.

Christian religion in this country has remained quiet and well-behaved. The Churches have done much good, they have not neglected many of their opportunities particularly in the Mission Field, but both they and the laity have failed to realise the essential quality of Christianity—its active evangelical spirit which cannot remain quiet or "well-behaved" in order to fit in with the political and business interests of Europe. For too long we have kept our faith in the background. To face the issues at stake in these days in a true Christian spirit, to make our religion not only the foundation but also the chief plank of our national and international outlook would be a policy of true realism.

II.

I fancy there will be no disagreement with the comprehensive programme you outline in your New Year issue—if only because it is so general. Of your five points I think the first one, the reawakening of

religious faith, is infinitely the most important. But I wonder what exactly it means, or how it is to come about. Personally I feel—and have had it borne in upon me by my work—that a prerequisite of any such reawakening must be a much clearer statement by the Church of what essential religion means and demands, and—equally necessary—of what it does not mean and demand.

There are many things in the faith of our fathers which never will or can or should be reawakened. They were appropriate and effective symbols or forms of expression in their days, but not in these days. Many of them are not of the substance of the faith, but they have been stressed so much that they are often imagined to be so. I believe that it is in no small measure because the Church is unwilling or unable to be afraid to revise some of its doctrines and practices, pretty thoroughly and avowedly, that it is losing its grip, and is therefore trying all sorts of secondary things, from social reform to psychology, in an effort to regain power.

I feel that sometimes the Church is far too quiet about this, taking great heed that it does not offend—not the old ones. Some ministers do not always realise that their own frightened and—in the best sense—modern background is very different from that of the average man in the pew, let alone the man in the street. I know personally of one deservedly admired minister in this city (now dead) who was entirely unaware that

his healthy presentation of the Gospel was being nullified in a very important way by an elderly spinster who was teaching the crudest hell-fire to the children in his Sunday school. And I wonder whether, if he had known, he would have withstood her to her face because she was to be blamed, as that might have caused a good deal of talk at the sewing meeting.

III.

By explicit religious teaching I mean teaching, not as an hypothesis but as revealed truth, the views about the nature and relation of God, man and the world, and about the significance of the life, death and personality of Jesus Christ, which are held by the Christian Churches. These are arresting and extraordinary views about reality—and a lot of people do not believe them to be true.

How in the world are you going to teach the Gospel of Christ in the national schools if half the teachers and parents don't believe it? I think the Churches think much too much about indifference. If that were all, the task would only be one of waking up. But there are lots of people (like me) who aren't a bit indifferent, who are informed about the Christian faith and find no conviction, but, on the contrary, perhaps, find quite a different conviction. It isn't a case of waking them up. And you can't very well beat them down.

II.—A Pastoral View

Side by side with these utterances of the mind may be set the following letter from a vicar describing the pastoral task as he sees it:

To approach the whole business of trying to establish a Christian order from the standpoint of a parish priest. That in itself raises a host of problems which are not being tackled in a manner worthy of their magnitude. As a parish priest my energies are of necessity being absorbed in the day to day task of leading ordinary men and women to live the Christian life. I can be content with nothing less for them than

the life of saintliness. As I understand the business of being a Christian that is surely our main concern. A "life hid with Christ in God" must be overwhelmingly supernatural and other-worldly. Here is our centre of gravity. And the weakness of so much Christian witness and activity is that it lacks this very quality of supernaturalism, and is little better than a life of decency and of living up to the standards of a gentleman.

The religion of those with whom we have most dealings, while it is deeply personal, is also almost entirely individual-

istic. The understanding of the corporate nature of faith in Christ is almost entirely lacking, or of its social implications. As a result, there is a wide gulf between the practice of worship and the life of the world outside.

On the other hand, almost every parish contains a few laymen, who realise that our present disorders and discontents are spiritual in origin; and they would say that these disorders can be attributed to a widespread departure from our Christian moorings. But there they seem content to leave the matter so far as Church membership is concerned. Probably they feel that worship is irrelevant. At any rate, the country is full of well-intentioned and thoughtful laymen who call themselves Christians, but who refuse to identify themselves in any effective way with public worship. They are as anxious as any to see the application of Christian principles to national and international life, but I suppose that their refusal to assist in the Church's worship is due to a failure to see any vital connection between worship and the conduct of practical affairs.

At present it seems to me this spiritual force is running to waste; and as a parish priest I regard it as part of my responsibility to harness it.

My misgivings about the plight of

Christianity in the world to-day are aroused by the weakness or lack of community itself within the Christian Church. How we expect the world to pay heed to the Gospel if the community of Christians is not expressing that Gospel in its corporate life? As I read the story of the Church's expansion stage by stage in the *Acts*, the thing that impresses itself upon my mind is its amazing and irresistible appeal. What was the secret of its success? Surely it was its corporate life—the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Here was a quality of life that was its own *apologia*.

You will perceive that I have been trying to hold the balance between the "natural" end of man and his "supernatural" end. There must be this constant interplay between the "religious" and the "secular." Unless there is this deliberate and conscious movement from the sacred to the profane and from the profane to the sacred, both become losers. The religious becomes side-tracked and falsely other-worldly, concerned with what von Hügel called "little churchiness," whereas the secular becomes wholly this-worldly and secularised. This would seem to be our present plight. And the problem of all these ills which for its solution will demand the utmost of our thought and prayer is the true alliance of these twin activities of man.

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